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# How We Bring You Some of The **Purest Water** in America.

Massachusetts  
**Water Resources**  
Authority

## Where does our water come from?

Nearly half of the population of Massachusetts, including most of Greater Boston, receives water from the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs. Located in central Massachusetts, the Quabbin holds 412 billion gallons when full and is the largest single-purpose reservoir in the United States. The Wachusett, located in Clinton, is capable of holding 65 billion gallons.

From these reservoirs, a network of 400 miles of MWRA tunnels, aqueducts and large pipes feeds the more than 6,000 miles of smaller pipes owned by the communities. Water is distributed to households and industries through these smaller pipes. This vast system, completed in the 1930s, supplies more than 2 million people with some of the purest water in the nation.

The system is jointly operated by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA). The MDC owns and manages the reservoirs and the watershed areas around them. The MWRA supplies water to each community through its water distribution system.



## Why is our water so clean?

The combined waters of the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs and the Ware River provide Greater Boston with remarkably clean water. There are two reasons for the water's purity. The first is that the area around Quabbin and the Ware River is sparsely populated and almost entirely forested. The state bought much of the watershed when the reservoir was created, assuring a pristine environment in which to collect the water. As a result, there are no septic tanks, little industry and few cars to pollute it.

The other reason for the water's purity is the sheer size of the Quabbin. Its water moves slowly, taking as long as four years to reach the aqueduct that brings it through the system. In that time impurities settle to the bottom, leaving the water clean and pure.



## Working together for clean water.

The MWRA is an independent authority that provides wholesale water and sewer services to 2.5 million people in 60 communities. It is governed by a Board of Directors with representatives appointed by the Governor, the Mayor of Boston, and member communities. The MWRA was created in 1985 by the Governor and the State Legislature to modernize these water and sewer services, to conserve water resources and to improve the water quality of Boston Harbor.

Run as a partnership between the MWRA and the Metropolitan District Commission, the water system provides the region with high quality water from the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs.

In 1987, the MWRA began a long-range water supply program to modernize the system, protect existing supplies and promote conservation.



### 1796: Jamaica Pond

Boston's early settlers relied on water from cisterns and underground wells, but the quality was poor and the supply inadequate. The first attempt to provide an alternative came from a private company: In 1796, the Aqueduct Corporation began delivering water from Jamaica Pond through a system of wooden pipes.

### 1848: Lake Cochituate

The practice of regularly washing down Boston's streets and alleyways to prevent the spread of disease required more water. Moreover, the city needed water to fight fires. After decades of debate, Boston hired John Jervis, who built a reservoir and aqueduct to supply 18 million gallons of water per day from Long Pond in Natick. Renamed Lake Cochituate, the reservoir was used until 1946.

### 1878: Sudbury Reservoirs

Due largely to the introduction of indoor plumbing, Boston soon reached the limit of its supply. By 1878, a system of small reservoirs on the Sudbury River was completed. Water from Cochituate, Sudbury and Mystic Lake in Charlestown provided Boston with 69 million gallons per day.

### 1906: Wachusett Reservoir

In 1893, with population booming, the Legislature directed the State Board of Public Health to devise a means for supplying water to Boston and all suburbs within 10 miles of the State House. The board's chief engineer, Frederic Stearns, recommended creating a reservoir on the Nashua River in Clinton. The result was the Wachusett Reservoir, which began feeding water to the Sudbury system in 1908.

### 1946: Quabbin Reservoir

Stearns' long-term plans included a giant reservoir still further west. The Wachusett, Sudbury, and Cochituate systems could deliver 169 million gallons of water per day, but a quarter of this water was of poor quality, affected by increased development on the Cochituate and South Sudbury watersheds. After years of debate, most of which concerned the great sacrifice of land and community required for the new reservoir's construction, the plan for Quabbin was approved. The 412 billion-gallon reservoir was completed in 1939 and filled to capacity by 1946.

### 1989: Quabbin Reservoir, 70% full

Two million people in the metropolitan area depend on water from the Quabbin and Wachusett every day. Designed to provide an average of 300 million gallons per day, the system must now regularly meet demand that exceeds this amount by up to 10%. Consequently, Quabbin's level has gradually fallen since it was last full in 1984. The MWRA is investigating ways to meet the needs of the region by reducing demand through water conservation and by utilizing additional local sources.



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